Saskatchewan
Agriculture
and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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SASKATCHEWAN SWINE INDUSTRY HAS ROOM TO GROW

Recent developments in Manitoba have highlighted the opportunities in the pork industry here in Saskatchewan.

The Manitoba government has imposed a moratorium on new or expanded swine operations in the province – effectively putting the brakes on industry growth in that province.

The Manitoba hog barn moratorium will remain in place while a committee reviews the impact of the industry on the environment. There is no deadline or anticipated timeline for the committee to complete its work.

Harvey Wagner, the Manager of Producer Services for Sask Pork, said the moratorium may indirectly benefit the industry in Saskatchewan.

Wagner said, in the short term, there may not be much impact – but in the long term, the moratorium could affect investor decisions about where to build new hog barns or expand existing facilities.

"People have to put a lot of money into a facility, so they want to be sure that it is in a place that is going to be welcoming them. Investors have a long memory," said Wagner.

In Saskatchewan, the government supports continued growth of the industry here. Wagner says Premier Lorne Calvert made that clear in a recent speech to the pork industry.

"The Premier spoke to the pork industry on November 14 and indicated that the province saw value in the pork industry and would like to see it continue to grow," said Wagner.

Even without an expansion moratorium to the east, Wagner says Saskatchewan has some market advantages. Meanwhile, other market factors are putting the brakes on swine industry expansion to the west.

"One thing that has really been causing a lot of grief in Alberta is labour. They are having trouble staffing facilities, given the heat of that economy right now. They also have fairly high demand for their feed grains, given the feedlots in southern Alberta, so that can be a bit of a challenge," said Wagner.

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Wagner pointed out that Saskatchewan has more feed grain available than anywhere else and has a better labour situation. Saskatchewan also has demand for a by-product from swine production: manure.

"Certainly, compared to Manitoba, we have an awful lot of land that would really benefit from manure application. We don't have the same run-off issue because our land doesn't have the same watershed as Manitoba. We can utilize that manure as a high quality fertilizer," explained Wagner.

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INDUSTRY HEAVYWEIGHTS MAKE "CASE" FOR BIODIESEL

A number of recent small announcements could add up to a significant boost for the biodiesel industry in the long term.

Just last month, a couple of heavyweights in the global farm equipment market endorsed using biodiesel in their products.

Case IH was the latest to announce its support. Every piece of equipment will now leave Case IH factories with a biodiesel blend in the tank, and it has approved the use of B20 (20 per cent biodiesel and 80 per cent petroleum-based diesel) in all Case IH engines.

"One hundred per cent factory fill of a biodiesel blend is a logical next step in the process of embracing biodiesel," said Randy Baker, president of Case IH North America.

Field testing is being conducted to determine performance levels of blends of up to 100 per cent biodiesel as part of a program to ensure maximum productivity and engine durability.

Case is just the latest to give biodiesel a boost. Last month, Kubota Tractor Corporation announced it has approved the use of "B5" biodiesel fuels in specified Kubota diesel-powered products.

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Crop Development Specialist Skip Munshaw said there are a number of benefits for both equipment manufacturers and producers to using biodiesel.

"Case and Kubota are adding to the growing list of equipment manufacturers that endorse biodiesel. Companies that appear to support 'green' technologies are becoming increasingly attractive to consumers and investors. Farmers will likely support this as well, as these endorsements help develop new markets for their crops, which could lead to higher (canola) oil prices," said Munshaw.

Munshaw said there are some technical benefits, as well.

"By doing factory fills with biodiesel, these companies could reduce the initial break-in wear for engines, so it indirectly helps to extend engine life," said Munshaw.

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"Biodiesel has better lubricity (lubrication qualities) than diesel, which can reduce fuel and maintenance costs. This has been demonstrated both in diesel passenger vehicles and in the recently completed Saskatoon BioBus project."

"Biodiesel quality is important. Poor quality fuel can cause problems such as deposit formation, filter plugging and poor cold flow properties. Equipment manufacturers only endorse biodiesel that meets American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM D6751) standards."

Burning biodiesel also can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by up to 50 per cent.

Biodiesel has numerous benefits for both producers and the environment. Biodiesel is renewable, non-toxic, clean-burning fuel that can be produced from locally grown feedstocks as widely varied as herring oil in the Maritimes to canola in Saskatchewan. Biodiesel can also be produced from waste products, like waste cooking oil and greases, or co-products or wastes from other industries.

Biodiesel is also behind a recent announcement from Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) of its intention to expand its canola crushing capacity at several of its facilities, including the crushing plant in Lloydminster.

ADM said the new crush capacity is to support expansions at its biodiesel facilities in North Dakota and Missouri.

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LOOKING AT SEEDING FORAGES ON MARGINAL LAND

As a landowner looking to seed marginal cropland to forage, it is worthwhile checking to see if your land qualifies for the federal government's Land Conversion program.

"Producers must realize that this is really an environmental program, and only very marginal soils will qualify," said Trevor Lennox, Forage Development Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food in Swift Current.

In Saskatchewan, the Crop Insurance rating system is used to qualify land for this program, with land rated "L" or lower qualifying.

In order to take advantage of the program, producers must apply prior to Jan. 31, 2007. This will definitely be the last year for this program, and the land must be seeded in the spring of 2007 – no fall seedings will be covered in 2007.

Marginal soils are usually lacking in organic matter and have severe limitations for annual cropping. It is for these reasons that some people are choosing to seed native mixtures for forage. Native grasses have adapted to the harsh environmental conditions experienced on the Canadian Prairies and require very few inputs, as they have evolved under conditions of low fertility. Lennox said they are also becoming more affordable.

"In recent years, the seed cost for native species has come down significantly, with a simple mixture of four or five species being put together for approximately $50 per acre. When one considers that the native grasses will be there for several decades, it really is a viable option for producers to consider. When looking to plant native species, it is important to secure seed sources early, as supply of some species are limited," said Lennox.

When putting together native mixtures, it is important to choose species that complement each other. Native species will behave similarly to tame species in that you will have some initial years of high productivity, followed by lower productivity as the stand comes into balance with nature.

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Sending in an application does not guarantee acceptance. Producers must wait to hear back from Greencover Canada as to whether an application has been approved or not. The program pays producers $45 per acre to seed tame species and $100 per acre to seed native species. Upon completion of seeding, landowners will submit their seed bills and payment should follow shortly, with $20 per acre paid for tame grass and $75 per acre for native grass. Upon successful establishment of the forage stand, producers will receive the remaining $25 per acre.

If you feel this program would benefit your operation, further details and program applications are available on the website www.agr.gc.ca/greencover-verdir/applic_e.phtml, or phone 1-866-844-5620.

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FRUIT GROWERS CONVENE IN SASKATOON

Saskatchewan fruit growers gathering at their upcoming annual conference will be pleased to know that the latest statistics show Canadians are adding more fresh fruit to their diets.

Statistics Canada reports that the average Canadian consumes almost 40 kilograms of fresh fruit a year. That's over four kilograms a year more than a decade ago.

Charon Blakley, the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Fruit Growers Association, is not surprised.

"I think there is going to be even more research showing the health benefits of fruit," said Blakley.

Fruit consumption continues to increase, and so does the number of fruit producers in Saskatchewan. Blakley is expecting attendance at the two-day conference to be over 200.

The conference, January 12 and 13 at the Heritage Inn in Saskatoon, features well over a dozen speakers on a wide variety of topics.

"The agenda is very balanced, whether you are an established grower or just beginning, there is something for you, right from the latest research on fruit production to adding value to the fruit grown" said Blakley.

One of the highlights of the conference will be a preview of a new manual for growing saskatoons. The manual has been in the works for some time, and will not be released until later in the spring, but the authors will share some of the material at the conference.

Another session, entitled "Can An Apple A Day (Alone) Really Keep the Doctor Away?," will examine a growing body of evidence that suggests that consumption of some types of fruit renders specific health benefits which are key, not only to health, wellness and beauty, but also to disease intervention and prevention.

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Canadians must think there is some benefit to an apple a day. Statistics Canada says apples accounted for one-fifth of fresh fruit consumption, with each Canadian consuming 7.6 kilograms of apples each year on average.

Blakley predicts Saskatchewan's apple crop will continue to expand as well as other crops, such as cherries, haskaps (blue honeysuckle), saskatoons and raspberries.
"More and more acres are being planted to fruit. We have a lot of good varieties that grow in Saskatchewan," said Blakley.

For more details on the Saskatchewan Fruit Growers Association and the annual conference, go to www.saskfruit.com.

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SASKATCHEWAN PORK PRODUCER GIVES AWAY FULL BELLIES

Thanks to the generosity of a Saskatchewan pork producer and a processor, food banks across the province have a lot more to fill up their Christmas hampers.

For the ninth year in a row, Big Sky Farms, Inc., a Humboldt-based hog production company, teamed with Mitchell's Gourmet Foods to deliver a 10-tonne donation of fresh pork to Saskatchewan food banks.

Big Sky Farms contributes the pork, which Mitchell's then processes and wraps for distribution. The Regina and Saskatoon food banks each received 5,000 kilograms (five tonnes) of pork, while food banks in Canora, Wadena and Humboldt each received 500-kilogram donations.

Big Sky Farms CEO Florian Possberg says the Christmas donation tradition is one of his favourite ways to give back to communities that support the pork industry in Saskatchewan.

"Even though this has been a bit of a rocky year for our industry, we are still very fortunate," said Possberg. "We are happy to know that we're helping put Christmas dinner on the table for families who need it the most."

After nearly a decade of receiving this donation, the food banks know they can trust that the truck will pull up right on time every December.

"This donation is something we've come to count on over the years," said Saskatoon Food Bank Executive Director Bob Pringle. "It's nice to be able to share with all of the food bank's clients, who don't always have meat to include in their meals because it is such an expensive item."

The size of the donation is also a gift to food bank clients, who are sometimes prioritized based on need.

"Usually when we have meat, it goes to families with children first," said Regina Food Bank CEO Wayne Helquist. "A donation of this size means single adults and couples will also be able to enjoy a nice holiday meal." Helquist said clients are always sure to let them know the donation is appreciated.

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Big Sky has its corporate headquarters in Humboldt, and owns and operates swine production units in the Humboldt, Goodeve, Kelvington, Lintlaw, Preeceville, Sturgis, Ogema, Rama and Porcupine Plain areas.

Big Sky is one of the largest pork producers in Western Canada. Mitchell's is located in Saskatoon and owned by Maple Leaf Foods of Canada.

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